

**Amendments to the Claims:**

This listing of claims will replace all prior versions and listings of claims in the application:

1. – 94. (Canceled)

95. (Currently Amended) A method of stabilizing a test sample for use in a ligand binding assay for measuring [[the]] a level of a natriuretic peptide in said test sample, wherein the method comprises the step of:

mixing from about 5% to about 95% (v/v) of at least one diluent having a pH of from about 4.0 to about 6.0 with at least one biological sample derived from serum, plasma, whole blood or other bodily fluids and that contains at least one natriuretic peptide, to form a stabilized test sample having a pH from about 4.0 to about 6.5.

96. (Currently Amended) The method of claim 95, wherein the natural natriuretic peptide is a natural peptide selected from the group consisting of human natural atrial natriuretic peptide, human natural B-type natriuretic peptide, human natural C-type natriuretic peptide [[or]] and human natural Dendroaspis natriuretic peptide.

97. (Original) The method of claim 95, wherein from about 70% to about 90% (v/v) of a diluent is mixed with at least one biological sample.

98. (Original) The method of claim 95, wherein the diluent has a pH of from about 5.4 to about 5.6.

99. (Original) The method of claim 95, wherein said diluent comprises at least one natriuretic stabilizing compound.

100. (Original) The method of claim 99, wherein said natriuretic stabilizing compound is a protein or a polymer.

101. (Currently Amended) The method of claim 100, wherein the protein is selected from the group consisting of bovine serum albumin, bovine gamma globulin, [[or]] and a non-fat dry milk.

102. (Currently Amended) The method of claim 100, wherein the polymer is selected from the group consisting of polyethylene glycol, dextran, dextran sulfate [[or]] and polyvinyl pyrrolidone.

103. (Original) The method of claim 95, wherein the diluent further comprises at least one buffer, or at least one acid, or at least one base, or combinations of at least one buffer, at least one acid and/or at least one base .

104. (Currently Amended) The method of claim 103, wherein said buffer is selected from the group consisting of an acetate buffer, a citrate buffer, a phosphate buffer [[or]] and combinations thereof.

105. (Currently Amended) The method of claim 103, wherein said acid is selected from the group consisting of acetic acid, citric acid, diethylenetriaminepentaacetic acid, hydrochloric acid [[or]] and combinations thereof.

106. (Original) The method of claim 103, wherein said base is sodium hydroxide.